

PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The Arlington Conservation Commission (ACC) is required by state and local laws to protect and preserve wetlands and waterways and their surrounding areas. The ACC is comprised of seven volunteers who are appointed by the Board of Selectmen, and a part-time, paid administrator. At meetings twice a month and through on-site visits, commission members work to ensure that all construction and development projects, residential and commercial, that may alter any wetlands, floodplains, rivers, streams, ponds and/or lakes are in compliance with state and local regulations. The ACC also protects and manages the Town's conservation lands and natural resources.

Regulatory Activities

The ACC is mandated to protect wetlands, waterways, water supplies, fisheries, wildlife and wildlife habitat as well as regulate activities in a floodplain through its administration of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and the Arlington General Bylaw for Wetlands Protection. ACC members regularly seek continuing education to ensure legal compliance with frequently changing regulations and to assist applicants through the regulatory process.

In the year 2005, the ACC convened twenty-two public meetings, and provided extensive coordination, monitoring, permit review and consultation on three major town-managed projects: the dam rehabilitation at Arlington Reservoir, reconstruction of Spy Pond Park and the Symmes property redevelopment. The board issued five Orders of Conditions, three Determinations of Applicability, three Enforcement Orders, one Permit Amendment and one Permit Extension.

Conservation Activities

Land Stewards – Our volunteer citizen organization, Arlington Land Stewards (ALS) has assisted in managing twenty-four town-owned conservation lands comprising approximately thirty acres. Land stewards monitor, coordinate and maintain, with permission from the ACC, conservation land of their choice, often in their immediate neighborhood or sometimes elsewhere in Town. Each land steward is provided with a stewardship handbook listing the location of conservation lands, conservation land regulations as well as problem/solution management information. The handbook is available online at http://town.arlington.ma.us/town/concom/LS/concom_LS_01.htm

Activities in 2005 include:

Land Stewards Meeting – An informational meeting was held on Tuesday, April 26, 2005 at the Fox Branch Library, at which John Pickle, a neighbor of

Menotomy Rocks Park and scientist, discussed how a variety of new technologies are being deployed to evaluate varying levels of plant health. Mr. Pickle informed stewards of a new way to detect plant stress, quickly and efficiently, through glasses designed with special lenses. He also explained how digital cameras could be used to document the current health of trees as well as examine changes over time. Mr. Pickle related how aerial photography using kites, balloons and radio-controlled airplanes could supplement information provided by free satellite images.

The Window on the Mystic – Eagle Scout Tommy Reilly, along with other members of Troop 507, constructed a gravel pathway with secured steps leading from the street down to the shoreline, as a project to benefit the conservation land located on Mystic Street.



Pathway stabilization at Window on the Mystic, 2005

Arlington Conservation Stewardship Fund (ACSF) – The Arlington Land Trust (ALT), in partnership with the ACC, established a new tax-deductible fund to support land stewardship activities in Arlington. Monies from the ACSF were used to purchase materials for trail work at Meadowbrook Park.

Arlington Reservoir – The ACC sponsored another year of an ongoing multi-year project to control water chestnuts at the Arlington Reservoir that were choking out wildlife and impairing water quality. This year again required only minimum hand removal of plants from the waterway by the contractor Aquatic Control Technologies, Inc., rather than by mechanical harvesters as needed in the first several years.

The Reservoir Dam rehabilitation project commenced work in April of 2005 and was completed, except for some landscaping, by December. A small area of reconstructed wetland was installed to replace some areas that were lost because of the dam repair

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work. The ACC will continue to monitor its development.



Wetland restoration area at the Arlington Reservoir, June, 2005

In compliance with the Town's regulations for tree replacement, new trees will be planted in compensation for those removed as a result of construction. The Town's recently formed Tree Committee will assist in the creation of a replanting plan.

Arlington's Great Meadows – In 2005, the Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows (FoAGM) has accomplished much; including construction of two boardwalks over wetland areas funded by a state grant. The annual report and other information is available at www.foagm.org.

Spy Pond – Reconstruction of the Spy Pond Park between Linwood Circle and Pond Road continued, and is due to be completed by May 2006. A project to reconstruct the path along the Route 2 side of the pond has been partially completed, and is designed to include new stabilized access points to the water while closing and restoring badly eroded sections of the shoreline.

Meadowbrook Park and Mystic Valley Parkway – In May 2005, land stewards, ACC members, and others carried out an extensive and successful cleanup of the conservation area. Many wetlands plants that had been planted in the previous year have become well established at the site.

Mystic River and Alewife Brook – Throughout 2005, the Tri-Community group of public officials and residents representing the towns of Arlington, Belmont and Cambridge continued to work on the problem of significant flooding as well as sewage contamination of the Alewife Brook. The group released a draft report "What We Know And What We Don't Know About Flooding Of The Alewife Brook", available at http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_BComm/BOS/tricomm/toc.

The USGS installed an automatic gauging station at the Broadway Bridge on Alewife Brook in August. The data is available at Real-Time Streamflow Data in the Mystic River Basin at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ma/nwis/current/?type=flow>.

2006 Goals and Beyond

The ACC will continue to encourage, support, and assist the various volunteer and environmental advocacy groups that are dedicated to better preserving the Town's precious conservation lands and other open spaces within its immediate borders as well as those directly adjacent to it. These groups include, among others: Arlington Land Stewards, Arlington Land Trust, Open Space Committee, Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows and Friends of Alewife Reservation (FAR), Mystic River Watershed Association, and the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions.

The ACC will work actively to support all efforts directed at preventing raw sewage from entering Alewife Brook. The ACC would like to see the Alewife Brook restored to a healthy, fishable, and swimmable waterway in the very near future. This goal will present a significant challenge for the many parties involved in the betterment of Alewife Brook, yet the ACC believes it is attainable.

The ACC, in working with the Open Space Committee and the Arlington Land Trust, hopes to identify and, when available, acquire additional open space as protected "conservation land" to benefit residents of the Town. Notably, Vision 2020 survey results from a 2001 polling showed the "acquisition of open space" as a top-ranked concern in residents' priorities for Arlington.

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Thanks

The ACC sincerely thanks all individuals and organizations that contributed directly or indirectly to the activities of its thirty-ninth year.

Thanks to Eagle Scout Tommy Reilly for his hard work in helping to restore The Window on the Mystic to a beautiful haven for nature lovers and wildlife.

Many special thanks go to the scores of volunteers who came out for cleanup projects, assisted as land stewards, or participated in the many Friends groups that work to preserve our natural resources and heritage.

In Special Tribute

Sadly, for the ACC and others who worked with her, Dorothy Maher, the Town's first Conservation Administrator, passed away suddenly in December 2005. As the ACC's administrator, since its inception and for close to 30 years, Ms. Maher was a highly organized, energetic, and tireless worker in guiding the Commission through its, often complex and challenging, administrative duties. Outside of her Commission-related duties, Ms. Maher was a wildlife and nature advocate. She will be sorely missed.